

# Feature Article

# **Compensation of Certified Health Education Specialists**

John Bonaguro, John White, David F. Duncan, Thomas Nicholson, and Becky J. Smith

### **ABSTRACT**

Health education moved toward professionalization with the establishment, in 1988, of the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. Today, there are approximately 8,000 active holders of the CHES credential. This article examines the compensation levels of CHES recipients in relation to their current position, employment setting and academic preparation. All current CHES-credentialed individuals listed in the directory were asked to complete an Internet-based survey about their compensation. A total of 1,377 usable surveys were completed for a response rate of 20%. The mean salary of all respondents was \$49,895. Full time supervisors had the highest mean salary of \$56,663. Annual salary was influenced by level of employment (full time, part-time), supervisory role, sex and highest degree earned. A baseline now exists for monitoring compensation of CHES professionals over time. In the future, both CHES and non-CHES individuals should be sought to determine whether certification status influences compensation.

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### INTRODUCTION

Between 1978 and 1989, health education moved toward professionalization with the development of a code of ethics, a verified role analysis and a credentialing system.<sup>1,2</sup> Certification is a form of individual credentialing, and is viewed as a mechanism to safeguard the quality of professional practice in health education. The individual certification system also impacts professional preparation as institutions strive to ensure that program graduates have an acceptable pass rate on the certifying examination. An additional aspect of impact is assurance for the public that Certified Health Education Specialists must keep pace with continuing education requirements.

In 1988, the mechanism for health education certification began with the establishment of the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. (NCHEC). NCHEC continued the movement started through the funding of The Role Delineation Project by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare in 1978. The Role Delineation Project and subsequent studies such as the Competency Based Framework 1,4 and Competencies Update Project 5 focused on the work of health educators, and provided the underlying data for both accreditation and certification in health education.

The Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) credential is awarded to individuals who meet eligibility standards, including professional preparation, and who pass a written examination. It must be renewed annually and 75 hours of continuing education must be documented every five years to maintain certification eligibility. The first CHES credential was awarded in 1989, and today, there are approximately 8,000 active

holders of the credential.

In 2007, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) added health education as a profession to the *Occupational Outlook*. It reported that health educators held about 57,900 jobs in 2006 with a median annual

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income of \$41,330. Beyond this one source, little is known about the compensation of health educators and nothing specific about compensation of holders of the CHES credential. Whereas, some CHES holders may be in positions covered by the BLS studies, there is no information about what proportion of CHES-credentialed individuals are in the survey. Further, just because an organization assigns a position the designation of "health education" does not mean that a professionally prepared health educator actually occupies that position. Thus, national data do not permit CHES-certified individuals to compare their compensation to others. Factors such as job title, rather than qualifications, confound such comparisons. This article examines the compensation levels of CHES recipients in relation to their current position, employment setting, and academic preparation.

In 1995 and 2002, NCHEC and Coalition of National Health Education Organizations (CNHEO) sponsored forums to discuss the future of the health education profession.<sup>7</sup> These forums identified focal points, one of which was "Promoting and Marketing the Profession" defined as "Promote the role and benefits of health education to policy makers, employers, professionals, the general public and students."<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, CNHEO commissioned a study by Hezel Associates surveying employers of health educators. This survey revealed that among surveyed employers only 19% of employed or contracted health educators held CHES certification and that the benefits of CHES were less well understood by respondents than the benefits of health educators in general.9 It is unknown whether being CHES credentialed translates into higher compensation given the lack of understanding documented among employers. Examination of compensation among health educators holding CHES certification provides its own baseline as well as comparison to BLS statistics.

# **PROCEDURES**

In 2007, the Research Consortium of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAH-PERD) approved \$4,325 to support a survey of CHES health educators. The survey targeted all CHES health educators and employed a web-based instrument. At the time of the study there were approximately 7,000 CHES making it feasible to include the entire population. The use of a web-based survey helped to make the study feasible given available funding. The importance to document baseline compensation levels of health educators and the importance of stimulating discussion within the profession were compelling reasons to conduct this exploratory study.

Participants were solicited via four mailings (two letters and two postcards) directing individuals to a website to complete a survey. There were no extramural incentives offered for participating. Mailing addresses were obtained from NCHEC. Approval of the protocol was obtained from Western Kentucky University's Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). The initial contact letter was mailed on September 11, 2007 and the final post card reminder was sent on December 11, 2007. The survey was closed on January 15, 2008. A total of 6,925 addresses of CHES-credentialed individuals were obtained for the initial mailing. Because of 46 non-working addresses, the mailing list was shortened to 6,879. A total of 1,377 usable responses were completed (20.0% of eligible participants). A limited number of these responses (n=18) were completed as "hard copies" at the request of some participants. The survey items can be found in Appendix A and at http://www.wku.edu/ aahe/compensation.

# **FINDINGS**

Respondent characteristics are presented in Table 1. An individual was considered to be a supervisor if she or he indicated part of the job involved supervision of any other employees. The majority (82.3%) of all respondents worked full time and were female (89.2%). Married (61.3%) and single (29.7%) respondents accounted for 91% of the sample. More than 75% of the sample was white, non-Hispanic. Most respondents

worked in higher education or in government. Whereas, 12.0% reported working in a hospital or clinic, only 6.5% reported being a nurse/health educator. These nurses reported spending a median of 35% (range 0% - 100%) of their time on health education activities.

The mean annual compensation reported by respondents was \$49,895 (Table 2). The mean reported salaries of men were higher than women at every level. The mean salaries of men employed full time (\$56,489) and women employed full time (\$46,623) differed significantly. The mean salaries for men who were supervisors (\$66,102) and women who were supervisors (\$55,007) also differed significantly.

Table 3 shows salary by highest degree obtained. Mean salaries for each employment category (part-time employee, full time employee, supervisor) increased as education increased. Table 4 shows salaries by degree for those individuals in the first year of their current position. Respondents working for the federal government had the highest mean salary (Table 5). Individuals working in a hospital/clinic setting reported the lowest salary with individuals working in agencies/organizations the second lowest.

Table 6 shows reported benefits by employment level. The majority of full time employees enjoy health insurance benefits (91.9% for employees; 91.7% for supervisors). A majority of part-time employees do not have this benefit (65.8% for employees; 59.3% for supervisors).

# HOW DO WE INTERPRET AND WHAT CAN WE CONCLUDE?

Typical response rates for surveys of professionals range from less than 10% to a little over 20%. <sup>10-13</sup> The response rate among CHES health educators of 20.0%, though respectable in comparison to other groups, does not guarantee representativeness. The self-report nature of the data also prohibits verification of validity. Of note, however, is the fact that these data were collected directly from CHES professionals themselves rather than from employers. Because the BLS salary figures were based on a sample of employers,



		Table 1.	CHES	Health E	ducato	r Samp	le Char	acteristi	cs			
	Other		PT Employee		FT Employee		PT Supervisor		FT Supervisor		Total	
Category	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender												
Male	14	12.7	2	2.5	49	8.6		0.0	84	14.9	149	10.8
Female	96	87.3	77	97.5	518	91.4	54	100.0	481	85.1	1226	89.2
Total	110	100.0	79	100.0	567	100.0	54	100.0	565	100.0	1375	100.0
Marital Status												
Single	29	26.6	19	24.1	208	36.8	6	11.1	145	25.8	407	29.7
Married	69	63.3	59	74.7	305	54.0	40	74.1	366	65.1	839	61.3
Widowed/Divorced	10	9.2	1	1.3	42	7.4	7	13.0	31	5.5	91	6.6
Other	1	0.9		0.0	10	1.8	1	1.9	20	3.6	32	2.3
Total	109	100.0	79	100.0	565	100.0	54	100.0	562	100.0	1369	100.0
Race												
Person of Color	30	26.8	13	16.5	138	24.3	11	20.4	150	26.5	342	24.8
White, Non-Hispanic	82	73.2	66	83.5	429	75.7	43	79.6	415	73.5	1035	75.2
Total	112	100.0	79	100.0	567	100.0	54	100.0	565	100.0	1377	100.0
Education												
Bachelors	26	23.9	24	30.8	161	28.7	20	38.5	115	20.6	346	25.5
Masters	66	60.6	48	61.5	328	58.5	29	55.8	355	63.7	826	60.9
Doctorate	13	11.9	6	7.7	48	8.6	3	5.8	67	12.0	137	10.1
Total	109	100.0	78	100.0	561	100.0	52	100.0	557	100.0	1357	100.0
Setting												
Public Schools		0.0	2	2.5	35	6.2	4	7.5	15	2.7	56	4.2
College/University	29	34.9	21	26.6	99	17.6	14	26.4	158	28.1	321	23.9
Business/Industry	7	8.4	7	8.9	41	7.3		0.0	27	4.8	82	6.1
Hospital/Clinic	3	3.6	18	22.8	65	11.5	12	22.6	67	11.9	165	12.3
Federal		0.0		0.0	48	8.5		0.0	19	3.4	67	5.0
State/Local	3	3.6	13	16.5	148	26.2	10	18.9	133	23.6	307	22.9
Agency	9	10.8	12	15.2	78	13.8	6	11.3	86	15.3	191	14.2
Other	32	38.6	6	7.6	50	8.9	7	13.2	58	10.3	153	11.4
Total	83	100.0	79	100.0	564	100.0	53	100.0	563	100.0	1342	100.0
Nurse												
Yes	11	10.0	9	11.5	30	5.3	11	20.4	28	5.0	89	6.5
No	99	90.0	69	88.5	536	94.7	43	79.6	536	95.0	1283	93.5
Total	110	100.0	78	100.0	566	100.0	54	100.0	564	100.0	1372	100.0



Table	2. CHES Heal	th Educator Annu	al Mean Salary by	Sex and Employme	ent Status	
	n	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	
			Male			
PT Employee	2	\$19,000	\$1,414	\$18,000	\$20,000	
FT Employee	49	\$56,489	\$20,471	\$16,000	\$110,000	
PT Supervisor	-	-	-	-	-	
FT Supervisor	83	\$66,102	\$25,127	\$26,000	\$144,000	
			Female			
PT Employee	70 \$26,752		\$14,946	\$1,200	\$72,000	
FT Employee	504	504 \$46,623		\$7,000	\$135,000	
PT Supervisor	52	52 \$35,360		\$1,500	\$103,000	
FT Supervisor	473	\$55,007	\$21,103	\$12,000	\$250,000	
			Total			
PT Employee	72	\$26,537	\$14,790	\$1,200	\$72,000	
FT Employee	553	\$47,497	\$16,818	\$7,000	\$135,000	
PT Supervisor	52	\$35,360	\$21,484	\$1,500	\$103,000	
FT Supervisor	556	\$56,663	\$22,084	\$12,000	\$250,000	
Total	1233	\$49,895	\$21,029	\$1,200	\$250,000	

the data reported herein may be more accurate than those reported by the BLS. BLS data represent the wages employers report paying to employees they consider to be health educators. It is commonly observed that many persons employed as health educators were not professionally prepared as health educators 14,15 and that health educators may be employed in positions not classified by their employers as such. There were clear differences between our respondents and those reported by BLS. These differences were particularly marked, with respect to persons reporting their employment venue as public schools (4.2% current sample vs. 0.85% BLS), colleges and universities (23.9% vs. 5.8%) and health care settings (12.3% vs. 35.6%).16

It is notable that this sample of CHES health educators reported a higher annual mean salary (\$49,895) than was reported by the BLS for all health educators (\$47,340)<sup>17</sup>one cannot compare the two sets of data directly. Whether the higher annual

mean salary is attributable to the CHES credential can be determined only through further study. We used seven employment settings for health educators whereas BLS used the more specific Standard Industry Classification (SIC) codes. We would recommend that future studies use the SIC codes to enable direct comparisons to national employment setting estimates.

Although this study suggests that gender has a significant impact on salary, the relatively small number of males in this sample makes attributing effect or drawing conclusion tenuous propositions. Education level clearly had the greatest impact on annual salary. For example, the difference between employees with a baccalaureate versus a doctorate was pronounced. The doctorate increased annual mean income by approximately \$15,500. For persons pondering higher education, it appears that the degree readily pays for itself over time. A similar result can be seen when comparing the masters' degree and the baccalaureate;

the former adds approximately \$7,700 of annual income on average.

Budgetary and temporal constraints limited the extensiveness of this study. Numerous unanswered questions of importance remain regarding compensation of health educators and the value of CHES certification. Periodic monitoring should be conducted including both credentialed and on-credentialed health educators to examine the impact CHES has on compensation. Furthermore, any studies should include data on under-represented racial/ethnic groups within the profession, either through sample design or as a separate study group. There should also be a further examination of part-time employees to determine the voluntary or involuntary nature of their part-time status and its impact regarding salaries and benefits.

We can suggest two techniques to assess the impact that CHES certification has on wages. First, using the BLS approach, ask employers what they pay health educators and



Table 3. CHES Health Educator Annual Mean Salary by Education Level and Employment Status **Employment** Ν SD Minimum Maximum Mean **Bachelors** Other 13 \$26,208 \$18,496 \$3,000 \$65,000 24 PT Employee \$20,494 \$12,519 \$2,000 \$48,000 FT Employee 131 \$38,002 \$11,363 \$12,000 \$85,000 15 PT Supervisor \$24,103 \$9,551 \$1,500 \$38,000 \$12,310 \$74,400 FT Supervisor 80 \$43,529 \$12,000 263 \$36,710 \$14,062 \$1,500 \$85,000 Overall Masters \$28,766 Other 37 \$39,838 \$10,000 \$165,000 \$13,540 PT Employee 41 \$28,288 \$1,200 \$55,000 \$48,039 \$7,000 FT Employee 348 \$15,571 \$110,000 PT Supervisor 30 \$37.006 \$21,122 \$9,000 \$95.000 FT Supervisor 382 \$56,568 \$19,862 \$24,000 \$215,000 Overall 838 \$50,204 \$19,871 \$1,200 \$215,000 Doctorate Other \$61,329 \$46,732 \$185,000 12 \$15,000 PT Employee 5 \$33,800 \$17,239 \$10,000 \$50,000 \$62,692 \$19,717 \$32,000 FT Employee 60 \$135,000 \$52,429 PT Supervisor 7 \$29,731 \$10,000 \$103,000 FT Supervisor 80 \$70,074 \$31,298 \$24,000 \$250,000 Overall 164 \$64,874 \$29,239 \$10,000 \$250,000 Total Other 62 \$41,140 \$32,836 \$3,000 \$185,000 70 PT Employee \$26,009 \$13,921 \$1,200 \$55,000 539 \$7,000 FT Employee \$47,231 \$19,717 \$135,000 PT Supervisor 52 \$35,360 \$1,500 \$103,000 \$21,484 FT Supervisor 542 \$12,000 \$56,637 \$22,251 \$250,000

also collect one additional piece of data—*Is* the employed health educator CHES certified? The BLS data, thus could be used to determine the impact of certification nationally on persons employed as health educators. The second approach is to ask employees directly about their compensation, as this study did. However, thorough performance of this technique requires the creation of a

listing of all health educators nationwide to sample, a listing that does not exist at this time. It would require significant investment of time, energy, and money to develop such a list. Moreover, because our own information indicates that health educators are employed in several areas, we would need to identify educators working in areas as diverse as public health, public and private schools, colleges and universities, health facilities, business and industry, governmental operations, voluntary organizations, and perhaps other venues. Whereas, the first option is probably easier to accomplish in the short term; the second option may be more helpful in marketing the profession to diverse constituencies. Working with professional organizations (e.g., members of NCHEO),



Table 4. CHES Health Educator Annual Mean Salary by Degree and Employment Level—First Year in Position Mean SD Minimum Maximum Degree Employee 70 \$63,000 **Bachelors** \$35,674 \$10,253 \$7,000 123 \$43,939 \$15,150 \$12,000 \$105,000 Masters 14 \$57,755 \$17,968 \$33,500 \$100,000 Doctorate Supervisor **Bachelors** 24 \$44,511 \$13,174 \$25,000 \$90,000 86 \$50,273 \$13,740 \$26,000 \$103,459 Masters 13 \$85,000 \$57,522 \$24,000 Doctorate \$20,467

Table 5. CHES	Health Educa	tor Annual Mea	n Salary by Emp	oloyment Setting	1				
Setting	n	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum				
	Full time								
Public Schools	50	\$53,593	\$20,044	\$12,000	\$104,000				
College/University	251	\$54,779	\$18,610	\$12,000	\$144,000				
Business/Industry	67	\$55,410	\$32,699	\$16,000	\$250,000				
Hospital/Clinic	128	\$48,950	\$16,965	\$12,000	\$120,000				
Government (Federal)	67	\$62,102	\$24,509	\$7,000	\$130,000				
Government (State or Local)	275	\$49,239	\$14,415	\$22,000	\$103,459				
Agency/Organization	161	\$47,773	\$18,431	\$16,320	\$135,000				
Other	105	\$53,932	\$25,140	\$24,000	\$215,000				
			Part-time						
Public Schools	5	\$21,000	\$12,903	\$9,000	\$42,000				
College/University	34	\$26,404	\$16,874	\$2,000	\$70,000				
Business/Industry	7	\$26,414	\$15,720	\$11,440	\$55,000				
Hospital/Clinic	28	\$35,162	\$17,395	\$9,600	\$95,000				
Government (State or Local)	21	\$27,392	\$10,775	\$10,000	\$51,000				
Agency/Organization	17	\$33,555	\$19,092	\$1,200	\$72,000				
Other	11	\$37,409	\$32,891	\$1,500	\$103,000				
Public Schools	55	\$50,630	\$21,595	\$9,000	\$104,000				
College/University	285	\$51,394	\$20,563	\$2,000	\$144,000				
Business/Industry	74	\$52,667	\$32,558	\$11,440	\$250,000				
Hospital/Clinic	156	\$46,475	\$17,796	\$9,600	\$120,000				
Government (Federal)	67	\$62,102	\$24,509	\$7,000	\$130,000				
Government (State or Local)	296	\$47,689	\$15,246	\$10,000	\$103,459				
Agency/Organization	178	\$46,415	\$18,910	\$1,200	\$135,000				
Other	116	\$52,365	\$26,254	\$1,500	\$215,000				

Table 6. CHES Health Educator Benefits by Employment Status										
	Other		PT Employee		FT Employee		PT Supervisor		FT Supervisor	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Health Insurance	27	24.1	27	34.2	521	91.9	22	40.7	518	91.7
Dental	21	18.8	25	31.6	460	81.1	25	46.3	463	81.9
Vision	17	15.2	16	20.3	394	69.5	15	27.8	355	62.8
Life	13	11.6	25	31.6	447	78.8	21	38.9	466	82.5
Disability	9	8.0	16	20.3	372	65.6	17	31.5	370	65.5
Development	32	28.6	32	40.5	418	73.7	30	55.6	415	73.5
Workman's Comp	20	17.9	35	44.3	469	82.7	28	51.9	490	86.7
Vehicle	4	3.6	0	0.0	37	6.5	3	5.6	53	9.4
Pension	13	11.6	28	35.4	378	66.7	27	50.0	422	74.7
Total	112	100.0	79	100.0	567	100.0	54	100.0	565	100.0

it may be possible to generate an inclusive list of health educators who can be sampled, regardless of certification status. Further, as the Hezel Associates report recommends, this step could be an interim one between two levels of professional certification.

Any future monitoring study that attempts to address these goals must be funded at a substantially higher level than was this exploratory initiative. There is a dearth of information about health educator salaries. BLS figures do not differentiate between CHES and non-CHES health educators and the qualifications of jobholders with the title of health educator. Given the current pressures on the workforce, perhaps there should be increased attention to expanding different avenues to obtain advanced degrees for working health educators. That initiative accompanied by monitoring the impact of certification could further advance the professionalization of the field.

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2007 AAHE Compensation Survey
Informed Consent
I understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and I believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.
Signature of Participant Date
Employment Information
1) What is your employment status?  Full time (35+ hours per week) Unemployed Part-time (34 or fewer hours per week) Retired Student Student
2) How long, in years, have you been with your organization? years
3) What is your employment setting?  Public Schools Government (Federal) Subject of Local Government (State or Local) Hospital/Clinic Other Specify:
4) What is the size of your organization? (Total number of employees at your organization.)
5) What is your job title?
6) What percentage of your typical work week is spent doing health education?%
7) Do your job duties involve supervising other health educators?  Yes No
8) Do you supervise people who are not health educators?  Yes No
9) How long, in years, have you been in this position? years
10) What was your annual salary as of December 31, 2006, excluding bonuses and fringe benefits? \$
11) Please indicate which of the following job benefits you receive:  Yes No Partial  Health Insurance Professional Development Dental Plan Workman's Compensation  Vision Plan Company Vehicle Pension Plan Pension Plan Dental Plan Pension Plan Pension Plan Disability Insurance



2007 AAHE Compensation Survey (continued)
12) Do you receive any benefits not listed in the table above?
13) How many weeks per year do you get vacation? weeks  14) How many official hours per week do you work? hours
15) How many actual hours per week do you work? hours  Demographic Information
16) What is your gender?  Male Female
17) What is your age in years? years  18) With what race and ethnicity do you most closely identify?  American Indian
19) What is your marital status? Single Married Widowed/Di vorced Other
20) What is the highest degree you have obtained?  Bachelors Masters Doctorate Post-Doctorate Other
21) What is the highest degree you have obtained in Health Education?  Bachelors Masters Doctorate Post-Doctorate Other
22) Are you a nurse?  Yes No Solution No Solution Years Have you been employed as a health educator? Years

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